THE

PROTESTANT RESOLUTION

OF

FAITH,

Being an Anſwer to

Three Queſtions.

I. How far we muſt depend on the Authority of the Church for the true ſenſe of Scripture?

II. Whether a viſible Succeſſion from Chriſt to this day makes a Church, which has this Succeſſion an infallible Interpreter of Scripture; and whether no Church, which has not this Succeſſion, can teach the true ſenſe of Scripture?

III. Whether the Church of *England* can make out ſuch a viſible Succeſſion?

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THE PREFACE TO THE READER.

THese Papers, which are here presented to thee, were writ for the use of a private Person, and by the Advice of some Friends, are now made Publick. We find how busie the Romish *Emissaries are to corrupt our People, and think our selves equally concerned to Antidote them against Popery and Fanaticism: Two extreams equally dangerous to the Government of Church and State in these Kingdoms, both in their Principles and Practices; and both of them very great Corruptions of the Christian Religion, and very dangerous to mens Souls. Some of our Clergy have already been so charitable to our Dissenters, as to warn them of their danger, and by the Strength and Evidence of Scripture and Reason, to Convince them of their mistakes; and I pray God forgive those men, and turn their Hearts, who will not contribute so much to their own Conviction and Satisfaction, as diligently and impartially to read and consider what is so charitably offered to them. Ignorance and mistake may excuse men, who have no opportunities of knowing better, but such willful and resolved Ignorance, which bars up mens minds against all means of better Information, will as soon damn them, as sins against knowledge.*

And now it might justly be thought want of Charity to those of the Roman *Communion, (should we take no care at all of them; nay, want of Charity to those of our own Communion, and to Dissenters themselves, who are daily assaulted by the busie Factors for* Rome. *For the Disputes against the Church of* Rome, *as well as against Dissenters, are for the most part too Learned, and too Voluminous for the instruction of ordinary People, and therefore some short and plain Discourses about the principal Matters in dispute between us, is the most effectual way we can take to confirm men in their Religion, and preserve them from the crafty Insinuations of such as lie in wait to deceive.*

Some few Attempts, which have been already made of that kind, give me some hope, that several other Tracts will follow, that the ruine of the Church of England (*if God shall please ever to permit such a thing*) *whether by Popery, or Fanaticism, may not be charged upon our neglect to instruct People better.*

Some Persons, it seems, whose Talent lies more in censuring what others do, than in doing any good themselves, are pleased to put some sinister Constructions on this Design; as it is impossible to design any thing so well, but men of ill minds, who know not what it means to do good for goods sake, shall be able to find some bad name for it. Some gues's that we now write against Popery only to play an after-Game, and to regain the Favour and good Opinion of Dissenters, which we have lost by writing against them: But I know not that any man has lost their Favour by it, nor that any man values their Favour for any other reason, than to have the greater advantage of doing them good. If so good a work, as confuting the Errors of the Church of Rome, *will give the Dissenters such a good Opinion of us, as to make them more impartially consider what has been writ to*

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perſwade them to Communion with the Church of England, *I know no reaſon any man has to be aſhamed to own it, though it were part of his deſign; but whether it is or not, is more than I know; I dare undertake for thoſe Perſons I am acquainted with, that they neither value the favour, nor fear the diſpleaſure either of Fanaticks or Papiſts, but yet heartily deſire to do good to them both.*

But there is a more miſchievous ſuggeſtion than this, that the deſign of ſuch Papers is only to raiſe a new cry and noiſe about Popery, and to alarm the People, and diſturb the Government with new Fears and Jealouſies: Truly, if I thought this would be the effect of it, I would burn my Papers preſently; for I am ſure the Church of England *will get nothing by a Tumultuary and Clamorous Zeal againſt the Church of* Rome, *and I had much rather ſuffer under Popery, than contribute any thing towards raiſing a Popular Fury to keep it out. We profeſs our ſelves as irreconcileable Enemies to Popery, as we are to Fanaticiſm, and deſire that all the World may know it; but we will never Rebell, nor countenance any Rebellion againſt our lawful Soveraign, to keep out either, we leave ſuch Principles and Practices to Papiſts and Fanaticks. But when we find our People Aſſaulted by the Agents of* Rome, *and do not think our ſelves ſecure from Popiſh Deſigns, we think it our Duty to give them the beſt inſtructions we can to preſerve them from ſuch Errors, as we believe will deſtroy their Souls; and cannot but wonder, that any men, who are as much concerned to take care of Souls as we are, ſhould think this a needleſs or a ſcandalous undertaking. I wiſh ſuch men would ſpeak out, and tell us plainly, what they think of Popery themſelves. If they think this Deſign not well managed, by thoſe who undertake it, it would more become*

them to commend the Design, and do it better themselves; I know no man, but would very gladly be excused, as having other work enough to imploy his time, but yet I had rather spend my vacant minutes this way, than in censuring the good that other men do, while I do none my self.

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The Words of the Paper, which was ſent to me, are theſe.

IT is my Opinion that the infinite Goodneſs of our Legiſlator, has left to us a means of knowing the true ſenſe and meaning of the Holy Scriptures, which is the Church: Now I judge this Church muſt be known to be the true Church, by its continual viſible Succeſſion from Chriſt till our Days. But I doubt whether or no the Proteſtant Church can make out this continual viſible Succeſſion, and deſire to be informed.

ANSWER.

THAT Chriſt has left a means of knowing the true ſenſe and meaning of the Holy Scriptures, I readily grant; or elſe it had been to no purpoſe to have left us the Scriptures. But the latter Clauſe is very ambiguous, for the meaning may either be, that we may underſtand by the Scriptures, which is the Church; or that the Church is the means whereby we muſt underſtand the true ſenſe and meaning of the Scripture.

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The first is a true Protestant Principle, and therefore I presume not intended by this Objector. For how we should know that there is any Church without the Information we receive by the Scripture, I cannot Divine; and yet we may as easily know that there is a Church, as we can know which is the true Church without the Scripture. For there is no other means of knowing, either that there is a Church, or what this Church is, or what are the Properties of a True and Sound and Orthodox Church, but by Revelation, and we have no other Revelation of this but what is contained in the Holy Scriptures.

As for the Second, That the Church is the means of knowing the true sense and meaning of the Scriptures, it is in some sense very true, in some sense very false.

1. It is in some sense true, and acknowledged by all sober Protestants. As, 1. If by the Church we understand the Universal Church of all Ages, as we receive the Scriptures themselves handed down by them to our time, so whatever Doctrines of Faith have been universally received by them, is one of the best means to find out the true sense of Scripture. For the nearer they were to the times of the Apostles, the more likely they were to understand the true sense of their Writings, being instructed by the Apostles themselves in the meaning of them. And thus we have a certain Rule to secure us from all dangerous Errors in expounding Scripture. For the great and fundamental Doctrines of the Christian Religion, are as plainly contained in the Writings of the first Fathers of the Church, and as unanimously asserted by them, as the Authority of the Scriptures themselves: and therefore though we have not a Traditionary Exposition of every particular

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Text of Scripture; yet we have of the great and fundamental Doctrines of Faith, and therefore must never expound Scripture so as to contradict the known and avowed sense of the Catholick Church. And this course the Church of *England* takes; she receives the Definitions of the four first General Councils, and requires her Bishops and Clergy to Expound the Scriptures according to the profest Doctrines of those first and purest Ages of the Church.

2. We ought to pay great deference to, and not lightly and wantonly oppose the Judgment and Authority of the particular Church, wherein we live, when her Expositions of Scripture do not evidently and notoriously contradict the sense of the Catholick Church, especially of the first and best Ages of it. For it does not become private men to oppose their Sentiments and Opinions to the Judgment of the Church, unless in such plain Cases, as every honest man may be presumed a very Competent Judge in the matter; and no Church, nor all the Churches in the World have such Authority, that we must renounce our Senses, and deny the first principles of Reason, to follow them with a blind and implicite Faith.

And thus the Church, that is, the Sense and Judgment of the Catholick Church, is a means for the finding out the true sense of Scripture; and though we may mistake the sense of some particular Texts, (which the *Romanists* themselves will not deny, but that even infallible Councils may do, who tho' they are infallible in their Conclusions, yet are not always so in the Arguments or Mediums, whether drawn from Scripture or Reason, whereby they prove them) yet it is Morally impossible we should be guilty of any dangerous mistake, while we make the Catholick Doctrine of the Church our Rule;

and in other matters follow the Judgment, and ſubmit to the Authority of the Church, wherein we live; which is as abſolutely neceſſary, as Peace and Order and good Government in the Church.

2. But then this is very falſe, if we mean that the Church is the only means of finding out the true ſenſe of the Scriptures; or if by the Church we underſtand any particular Church, as I ſuppoſe this Perſon does, the *Roman* Catholick, that is, the particular univerſal Church of *Rome*; or if we mean the Church of the preſent Age; or by Means underſtand, ſuch a Decretory Sentence, as muſt determine our Faith, and command our Aſſent; that we muſt ſeek for no other Reaſon of our Faith, but the Authority of the Church in expounding Scriptures. I ſhall diſcourſe ſomething briefly of each of theſe.

1. To ſay that the Church is the only Means to find out the true ſenſe of Scripture, is very falſe and abſurd. For, 1. This ſuppoſes the Holy Scriptures to be a very unintelligible Book, which is a great reproach to the Holy Spirit, by which it was Indited, that he either could not, or would not ſpeak intelligibly to the World.

2. This is a direct Contradiction to thoſe Exhortations of Chriſt and his Apoſtles to ſtudy the Scriptures, which were made to private men, and therefore neceſſarily ſuppoſes, that the Holy Scriptures are to be underſtood as other Writings are, by conſidering the Propriety of the Words and Language wherein they are written, the Scope and Deſign of the place, and ſuch other means, as honeſt and ſtudious Inquirers uſe to find out the meaning of any other Book.

3. If the Scriptures are ſo unintelligible, that an honeſt

honeſt man cannot find out the meaning of them, without the infallible interpretation of the Church. I would deſire to know whether Chriſt and his Apoſtles Preach'd intelligibly to their Hearers? If they did not, to what purpoſe did they Preach at all? By what means were men Converted to the Faith? If they did, how come theſe Sermons to be ſo unintelligible now they are written, which were ſo intelligible when they were ſpoken? For the Goſpels contain a plain Hiſtory of what Chriſt did, and of what he ſaid; and the Apoſtles wrote the ſame things to the Churches when they were abſent, which they Preach'd to them when they were preſent; and we reaſonably ſuppoſe, that they as much deſigned that the Churches ſhould underſtand what they Wrote, as what they Preach'd, and therefore that they generally uſed the ſame form of words in their writing and in their Preaching: And this makes it a great Riddle, how one ſhould be very plain and eaſie to be underſtood, and the other ſignifie nothing without an infallible Interpreter.

4. If the Scriptures be in themſelves unintelligible, I would deſire to know how the Church comes to underſtand them? If by any humane means, together with the ordinary Aſſiſtances of the Divine Spirit, then they are to be underſtood, and then why may not every Chriſtian in proportion to his Skill in Languages, and in the Rules of Reaſon and Diſcourſe, underſtand them alſo?

If the Church cannot underſtand the Scriptures by any humane means, but only by Inſpiration, (for there is no Medium between theſe two) to what purpoſe were the Scriptures written? For we might as well have learnt the will of God from the Church, without the Scriptures, as with them. God could

have immediately revealed his will to the Church without a written Rule, as well as reveal the meaning of that written Rule, which it ſeems has no ſignification at all, till the Church, by Inſpiration, gives an Orthodox meaning to it.

5. And if we cannot underſtand the Scriptures, till the Church Expounds them to us, how ſhall we know, which is the Church, and that this Church is ſuch an infallible Interpreter of Scriptures? The Church is to be known only by the Scriptures, and the Scriptures are to be underſtood only by the Church; if we will know the Church, we muſt firſt underſtand the Scriptures, and if we will underſtand the Scriptures, we muſt firſt know the Church, and when both muſt be known firſt, or we can know neither, it is impoſſible in this way, either to underſtand the Scriptures, or find out the Church.

For, ſuppoſe the Church does expound Scripture by Inſpiration, how ſhall we be aſſured that it does ſo? Muſt we believe every Man, or every Church, which pretends to Inſpiration? This is a contradiction to the Apoſtles Rule, not to believe every Spirit, but to try the Spirits. How then ſhall they be tried? I know but two ways, either by Miracles, or by Scripture. Miracles are now ceas'd, unleſs we will believe ſome fabulous Legends, which all wiſe men in the Church of *Rome* are aſhamed of; and if there were real Miracles wrought, they are of no Authority againſt a ſtanding Rule of Faith, which the Apoſtle calls a more ſure word of Propheſie. If then we muſt judge of theſe pretences to Revelation by the Scriptures, which is the only way now left, then there is a way of underſtanding the Scriptures without this Revelation; for if we muſt underſtand the Scriptures by Revelation, and Revelati-

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on by the Scriptures, we are got into a new Circle and can understand neither.

Obj. But do we not see how many Schisms and Heresies have been occasioned, by suffering every one to Expound Scripture for himself? How many Divisions and Sub-divisions are there among Protestants, who agree in little else, besides their opposition to Popery? And is it possible to cure this without an infallible Interpreter of Scriptures? Is it not a Contradiction to common Experience, to say, that the sense of Scripture is plain and certain, when so few men can agree what it is?

Ans. 1. Yes, we do see this, and lament it, and are beholden to the Church of *Rome*, and her Emissaries in a great measure for it. But yet we know, thus it has been in all Ages of the Christian Church, as well as now; and we take the same way to confute these Heresies, and to preserve the Purity of the Faith, and the Unity of the Church, which the Primitive Fathers did, by appealing to Scripture, and the Doctrine and Practice of the Catholick Church, which is the best way any Church can take, when there is no infallible Judge of Controversies: And if the Primitive Church had known any such infallible Judge, they would certainly have appealed to him, at one time or other; and it had been impossible, that any Errors or Heresies should for any long time together have disturbed the Church; but we hear nothing of him for many hundred years after Christ; but the ancient Fathers took the same way to confute the Heresies of their days, which we do now, which is a good probable Argument, that they knew no better. And the present Divisions of the Christian Church, are no greater Argument against us, than the Ancient Heresies were against the Primitive.

mitive Church, or than the Proteſtant Hereſies (as they are pleaſed to call them) are againſt the Church of *Rome*? For what advantage has the Church of *Rome* upon this account above any other profeſſion of Chriſtians. Thoſe who are of the ſame Communion are of the ſame Mind. Thus it is among us, and it is no better among them; for we are no more of their mind, than they are of ours; nay notwithſtanding all their pretences to infallibility, moſt of the Diſputes, which divide the Proteſtant Churches, are as fairly diſputed among themſelves, witneſs the famous Controverſie between the *Janſeniſts*, and *Moliniſts*; which their infallible Judge never thought fit to determine to this day. They live indeed in the Communion of the ſame Church, notwithſtanding theſe Diſputes, becauſe it is a very dangerous thing to leave it; but they are more beholden to the Inquiſition, than to infallibility for this Unity.

2. How do theſe Diviſions and Hereſies, which diſturb the Church, prove, that no man can be certain of his Religion? If we can certainly know what the ſenſe of Scripture is, notwithſtanding there are many different Opinions about it, then the diverſity of Opinions is no Argument againſt us; if we cannot be certain of any thing, which others deny, diſpute, or doubt of, then how can any Papiſt be certain that his Church is infallible? For all the reſt of the Chriſtian Church deny this, and ſcorn their Pretenſions to it. I may indeed ſafely acquieſce in the Determinations of an infallible Judge, whom I am infallibly aſſured to be infallible, how many contrary Opinions ſoever there are in the World; But when infallibility it ſelf is the matter of the diſpute, and I have no infallible way to know whether there be any ſuch thing, or where this infallibility is ſeated, if diverſity

verſity of Opinions be an Argument againſt the certainty of any thing, which I am not, and cannot be infallibly aſſured of, then it is a certain demonſtration againſt infallibility it ſelf.

Unleſs we will take the Church of *Romes* word for her own infallibility, we cannot have the Deciſion of an infallible Judge in this matter, for ſhe will allow no other infallible Judge, but her ſelf; and yet this is ſo abſurd a way, that it ſuppoſes, that we believe, and that we diſ-believe the ſame thing at the ſame time. For unleſs we before-hand believe the Church to be infallible, her ſaying ſo is no infallible proof that ſhe is infallible; and yet the very demand of a proof ſuppoſes that we are not certain of it, that we doubt of it, or diſ-believe it. When we ask the Church whether ſhe be infallible, it ſuppoſes that we are not certain of it, otherwiſe we ſhould need no proof; and whenwe believe theChurch to be infallible, becauſe ſhe ſays ſo, it ſuppoſes, that we did beforehand believe that ſhe is infallible, otherwiſe, her ſaying ſo is no proof.

The greateſt Champions for the Church of *Rome*, never pretended that they could produce any infallible proofs, which is the true Church. Cardinal *Bellarmine* attempts no more, than to alledge ſome Motives of Credibility, to make the thing probable, and to incline men to believe it; and yet it is impoſſible we can be more certain of the Infallibility of the Church, than we are, that it is a true Church; and if a Papiſt have only ſome motives of Credibility, to believe the Church of *Rome* to be a true Church, he can have no greater probabilities, that it is an infallible Church.

Now not to take notice, what a tottering Foundation ſome high probabilities, though they amount-

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ted to a moral assurance, is for the belief of Infallibility, which is to put more in the Conclusion than there is in the Premises. The only use I shall make of it at present is this, That we can at least be as certain of the meaning of Scripture, as the Papists are that their Church is infallible, for they can be no more infallibly assured of this, than we are of our interpretations of Scripture; and therefore, if the diversity of Opinions about the sense of Scriptures, proves that we cannot be certain what the true Sense of it tis, the same Argument proves, that they cannot be certain that their Church is infallible, because this is not only doubted, but absolutely denied by the greatest part of the Christian World, and was never thought of by the best and purest Ages of it. So that this Argument proves too much, and recoils upon themselves, like a Gun which is over-charged; and if, for their own sakes, they will grant that we may be certain of some things, which are as confidently denied, and disputed by others; then the diversity of Opinions in the Church, is no Argument, that we cannot be certain of our Religion, but only teaches us greater Caution, and Diligence, and Honesty, in our inquiries after Truth.

3. These Divisions and Heresies that are in the Christian Church, are no better Argument against the truth and certainty of our Religion, than the diversities of Religions that are in the World, are against the truth of Christianity. The whole World is far enough from being Christian; great part of it are *Jews*, or *Pagans*, or *Mahumetanes* still; and this is as good an Argument, to prove the uncertainty of all Religions, as the different Parties and Professions of Christians are to prove, that we cannot be certain, what the true Christian Church, nor what true Christianity is.

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The Gospel of our Saviour was not designed to offer any force or violence to mens Faith or Understanding, no more than to their Wills. Were there such an irresistible and compulsory Evidence in the Gospel, that wherever it were Preach'd, it should be impossible for any man, though never so wicked and ill disposed, to continue an Infidel, or to prove a Heretick, Faith would be no greater a Virtue, than forc'd Obedience and Compliance is. The Gospel has Evidence enough to Convince honest Minds, and is plain enough to be understood, by those who are honest and teachable; and therefore has its Effects upon those who are Curable, which is all that it was designed for. Those, who will not believe, may continue Infidels, and those, who will not understand, may fall into Errors, and believe a Lye; and yet there is Evidence enough to Convince, and Plainness enough to Instruct well disposed minds, and certainty enough in each to be the foundation of a Divine Faith.

The sum is this, Though the Instructions of the Church are a very good means for the understanding of the sense of Scripture, yet they are not the only means; the Holy Scripture is a very intelligible Book, in such matters as are absolutely necessary to Salvation; and could we suppose, that a man, who had never heard of a Church, should have the use of the Bible, in a Language which he understood, by a diligent reading of it he might understand enough to be saved.

2. If by Church is meant any particular Church; as suppose the *Roman* Catholick Church, or the Church of the present Age, it is absolutely false to say, that the Church, in this sense, is always a sure and safe means of understanding the Scripture. What

has been Unverſally believed by all Chriſtian Churches, in all Ages, or at leaſt, by all Churches of the firſt and pureſt Ages of Chriſtianity, which were neareſt the times of the Apoſtles, and might be preſumed beſt to underſtand the ſenſe of the Apoſtles in the great Articles of our Faith, is a very ſafe Rule for the interpretation of Scripture; and the general Practice of thoſe Primitive Apoſtolick Churches, in matters of Government and Diſcipline, before they were corrupted by worldly Ambition, and ſecular Intereſt, is a very ſafe Rule for our Practice alſo, and this is the Rule whereby our Church is reformed, and to which we appeal.

There are but three things neceſſary to be underſtood by Chriſtians, either the Articles of Faith or the Rules of Life, or the external Order and Diſcipline of the Church, and Adminiſtration of Religious Offices.

1. As for the Rules of Life, all thoſe Duties which we owe to God and Men, they are ſo plainly contained in the Holy Scriptures, that no honeſt man can miſtake them; I ſuppoſe the Church of *Rome* her ſelf, will not pretend, that there is any need of an infallible Interpreter to teach men what is meant by Loving God with all our Heart, and our Neighbour as our ſelves.

2. As for the Articles of Faith, thoſe which are fundamental to the Chriſtian Religion, and which every Chriſtian ought to believe, are ſo plain in Scripture, that every honeſt and unprejudiced man may underſtand them; but however, as I obſerved before, we govern our ſelves in theſe things by the received Doctrine of the Catholick Church of the firſt and pureſt Ages, and if this be not a ſafe Rule, we can be certain of nothing. And what the Catholick

lick Faith was, we learn from those short summaries of Faith, which were universally owned by all Catholick Churches. For what we now call the Apostles Creed, was very anciently received in all Churches, with some little variety indeed of Words and Phrase, but without any difference of sense; and the Catholick Faith was not only preserved in such short Summaries and Creeds, which were as liable to be perverted by Hereticks, as the Scriptures themselves, but was more largely explained in the Writings of the ancient Fathers; and though this will not inable us to understand every Phrase and Expression of Scripture, but we must use other means to do that, as Skill in the Original Languages, a knowledge of ancient Customs, and ancient Disputes, to which the Apostles frequently allude, a consideration of the Scope and Design of the place, &c. Yet the Catholick Faith received and owned by the Primitive Church, is so far a Rule, as it directs us to Expound Scripture to a true Catholick sense. As St. *Paul* commands the *Romans*, that those who propheſie, should Propheſie according to the proportion of Faith, *Rom.* 12. 6. Κατ' ἀναλογίαν πίστεως, according to the Analogie of Faith: That is, that in the interpreting the Scriptures of the Old Testament they should expound them to a Christian sense, according to those Doctrines of the Christian Faith, which he had taught them; and this was a safe Rule for expounding the Old Testament, which contained the Types, and Figures, and Propheſies of the Gospel-State. And thus in expounding the new Testament, now it is committed to writing, we must Propheſie according to the Analogie of Faith, or as he commands *Timothy* in his Preaching, Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard from me.

2 *Tim.* 1. 13. It seems the Apostle had given him a form of sound words, according to which he was to direct his Preaching; whether this refers to a short summary of Faith, such as our Creed is, I cannot say, though it is not improbable it may; but it is plain, we have a form of sound words delivered to us by the Catholick Church, which contains the true Catholick Faith, and therefore ought to be so far a Rule to us in expounding Scripture, as never to contradict any thing which is contained in it, for that is to contradict the Faith of the Catholick Church.

And when one great Article of this Faith, concerning the Eternal God-head of Christ the Son of God, was corrupted by *Arius*, a Presbyter of the Church of *Alexandria*, it gave an occasion for a more full Declaration of the sense of the Catholick Church about it. And though the effects of that Controversie were very fatal to the Church, yet it was very happy that it broke out in such an Age, when it could be determined with greater certainty and greater Authority, than it could have been in any succeeding Age of the Church; by men, who were venerable for their Age, for their Wisdom, for their Piety, for their undaunted Confessions under Heathen and Persecuting Emperours, who knew what the sense of the Catholick Church was, before this Controversie broke out, and before External Prosperity had, through ease and wantonness, corrupted the Faith, as well as the Manners of Christians.

3. As for matters of External Order, Discipline, and Government, the Universal Practice of the Catholick Church is the best and safest Comment on those general Rules and Directions we have laid down in Scripture. There is no doubt at all, but the Apostles did appoint Governours,

Governours, and Rules of Order and Diſcipline, in the Churches planted by them; what theſe were, the Chriſtians of thoſe days ſaw with their Eyes, in the daily practice of the Church; and therefore the Apoſtles, in thoſe Epiſtles which they wrote to their ſeveral Churches, did not give them ſo punctual, and particular an account of thoſe matters, which they ſo well knew before, but, as occaſion ſerved, make only ſome accidental mention of theſe things, and that in ſuch general terms, as were well enough underſtood by them, who knew the practice of the Church in that Age, but it may be, cannot meerly by the force of the words, which may be capable of ſeveral Senſes, be ſo certainly and demonſtratively determined to any one ſenſe (by us, who did not ſee what was done in thoſe days) as to avoid all poſſible Cavils of contentious men.

This has occaſioned thoſe diſputes concerning Infant Baptiſm, the ſeveral Orders and Degrees of Church Governours, the Rites and Ceremonies of Religious Worſhip, and the like. Thoſe who lived in thoſe days, and ſaw what the Apoſtles did in theſe matters, could not doubt of theſe things, though it were not in expreſs words ſaid, that Infants ſhould be baptized with their Parents, or that Biſhops are a Superiour Order to Presbyters, and Presbyters to Deacons, or that it is lawful for the Governours of the Church to inſtitute and appoint ſome ſignificant Rites and Ceremonies, for the more decent and orderly Adminiſtration of Religious Offices. But becauſe there is not a preciſe and punctual account given of theſe matters, in the Writings of the Apoſtles, which there was no need of then, when theſe things were obvious to their very Senſes, ſome perverſe and unreaſonable Diſputers, who obſtinately reject all other

Evidence,

Evidence, will judge of these things just as they please themselves, and alter their Opinions and Fancies, as often as they please.

But now if there be any certain way to know, what the practice of the Apostles was in these Cases, this is the best Comment we can possibly have on such Texts, as are not sufficiently plain and express without it. Now methinks any reasonable man must acknowledge, that the best way to understand the Practice of the Apostles, is from the Practice of the Catholick Church in succeeding Ages, especially while the memory of the Apostles was fresh, and the Church Governed by Apostolical men; when we cannot reasonably suspect any Deviation from the Primitive Practice; and this is the Rule which the Church of *England* owns in such matters, and by which she rejects and confutes both the Innovations and Corruptions of the Church of *Rome*, and the wild pretences of Fanaticism.

So that we do in the most proper sense own the Belief and Practice of the Primitive Church, to be the best means for Expounding Scripture. We do not leave every man to Expound Scripture by a private Spirit, as our Adversaries of the Church of *Rome* reproach us; we adhere to the ancient Catholick Church, which the Church of *Rome* on one side, and the Fanaticks on the other, have forsaken: And though we reject the new invention of an infallible Judge, yet we are no Friends at all to Scepticism, but can give a more Rational account of our Faith, than the Church of *Rome* can.

Had we no other way of understanding the sense of Scripture, but by Propriety of the Language, and the Grammatical Construction of the Words, and the scope and design of the Texts, their Connexion and

and Dependence on what goes before, and what follows, and ſuch like means as we uſe for the underſtanding any other Books of humane Compoſition; I doubt not, but honeſt and diligent Inquirers might diſcover the true meaning of Scripture, in all the great Articles of our Faith; but yet this alone is a more uncertain way, and lyable to the Abuſes of Hereticks and Impoſtors. The *Socinians* are a famous Example, what Wit and Criticiſm will do to pervert the plaineſt Texts; and ſome other Sectaries are as plain a demonſtration, what work Dullneſs and Stupidity, and Enthuſiaſm will make with Scripture; but when we have the practice of the Catholick Church, and an ancient and venerable ſummary of the Chriſtian Faith, which has been the common Faith of Chriſtians in all Ages, to be our Rule in Expounding Scripture, though we may after all miſtake the ſenſe of ſome particular Texts, yet we cannot be guilty of any great and dangerous miſtakes.

This uſe the Church of *England* makes of the Catholick Church, in Expounding Scripture, that ſhe Religiouſly maintains the ancient Catholick Faith, and will not ſuffer any man to Expound Scriptures in oppoſition to the ancient Faith and Practice of the Catholick Church.

But though the Belief and Practice of the Catholick Church be the beſt means of underſtanding the true ſenſe of Scripture, yet we cannot affirm this of any particular Church, or of the Church of any particular Age, excepting the Apoſtolick Age, or thoſe Ages which immediately ſucceeded the Apoſtles. Notwithſtanding this, the Church of *Rome* may be no good Expoſitor of Scriptures, for the Church of *Rome*, though ſhe uſurp the name of the Catholick Church, as preſuming her ſelf to be the Head and Fountain of

of Catholick Unity, yet ſhe is but a part of the Catholick Church, as the Church of *England*, and the Churches of *France* and *Holland* are; and has no more right to impoſe her Expoſitions of Scripture upon other Churches, than they have to impoſe upon her. If there happen any Controverſie between them, it is not the Authority of either Church can decide it, but this muſt be done by an appeal to Scripture, and the ſenſe of the Catholick Church, in the firſt and pureſt Ages of it.

For when we ſay, that the belief and Practice of the Catholick Church is the beſt means to find out the true ſenſe of Scripture, we do not mean that the Church is the Soveraign and abſolute Judge of the ſenſe of Scripture, but the meaning is, that thoſe Churches, which were founded by the Apoſtles, and received the Faith immediately from them, and were afterwards, for ſome Ages, governed by Apoſtolical men, or thoſe who were taught by them, and convers'd with them, are the beſt Witneſſes what the Doctrine of the Apoſtles was, and therefore as far as we can be certain, what the Faith of theſe Primitive Churches was, they are the beſt Guides for the Expounding Scripture.

So that the Authority of the Church in Expounding Scripture being only the Authority of Witneſſes, it can reach no farther than thoſe Ages, which may reaſonably be preſumed to be Authentick and Credible Witneſſes of the Doctrine of the Apoſtles, and therefore if we extend it to the four firſt general Councils, it is as far as we can do it with any pretence of Reaſon; and thus far the Church of *England* owns the Authority of the Church, and commands her Miniſters to Expound the Scriptures according to the Catholick Faith, owned and profeſs'd in thoſe days; but as

as for the later Ages of the Church, which were removed too far from the Apoſtles days, to be Witneſſes of their Doctrine, they have no more Authority in this matter, than we have at this day, nor has one Church any more Authority than another.

3. And therefore, if by the Church being the means of knowing the ſenſe and meaning of the Holy Scriptures, be underſtood the Judgment and Sentence, and Decree of the Church, that we muſt ſeek no farther for the reaſon of our Faith, than the infallible Authority of the Church, in Expounding Scripture, this alſo is abſolutely falſe and abſurd.

This is more than Chriſt and his Apoſtles aſſumed to themſelves, while they were on Earth; they were indeed infallible Interpreters of Scripture, but yet they never bore down their Hearers meerly with their Authority, but Expounded the Scriptures, and applied ancient Propheſies to their Events, and took the Vail off of *Moſes*'s Face, and ſhewed them the Goſpel-ſtate concealed under thoſe Types and Figures; they confirmed their Expoſitions of Scripture by the force of Reaſon, and appealed to the Judgments and Conſciences of their Hearers, whether theſe things were not ſo; Chriſt commands the *Jews* not meerly to take his own word, and to rely on his Authority for the truth of what he ſaid, but to ſtudy the Scriptures themſelves; and the *Bereans* are commended for this generous temper of mind, that they were more noble than thoſe of *Theſſalonica*, for they daily ſearcht the Scriptures, to ſee whether the Doctrine the Apoſtles Preach'd were to be found there or not? Now I think no Church can pretend to be more infallible than Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and therefore, certainly ought not to aſſume more to themſelves than they did; and if the Church of *Rome*, or

any other Church, will convince us of the truth of their Expoſitions of Scripture, as Chriſt and his Apoſtles convinc'd their Hearers, that is by inlightning our Underſtandings, and convincing our Judgments by proper Arguments, we will gladly learn of them.

This courſe the Primitive Chriſtians took, as is evident in all the Writings of the ancient Fathers againſt *Jews* and *Hereticks*; they argue from the Scriptures themſelves to prove what the ſenſe of Scripture is; they appeal indeed ſometimes to the ſenſe of the Catholick Church, not as an infallible Judge of Scripture, but as the beſt Witneſſes of the Apoſtolical Doctrine: Thus *Tertullian* argues againſt Hereticks, in his Book *De Præſcriptionibus*; but when they reaſon about the ſenſe of Scripture, they never direct us to any infallible Judge, but uſe ſuch Arguments, as they think proper to convince Gain-ſayers.

Nay, this is the way, which was obſerved in all the ancient Councils; the Biſhops of the Church met together for Common Counſel and Advice, and in matters of Diſcipline and Government, which were ſubject to their Authority, they conſidered what was moſt for the publick benefit of the Church, and determined them by their Authority, not as infallible Judges, but as Supreme Governours of the Church. In the diſputes of Faith, they reaſon from Scripture, and the ſenſe of the Catholick Church, not from their own Authority; and what upon a ſerious debate and inquiry they found to be moſt agreeable to the ſenſe of Scripture, and the Doctrine of the Church of former Ages, that they determined, and decreed to be received in all Churches, as the Catholick Faith. That this is ſo, is evident from all the Hiſtories of the moſt Ancient, and celebrated Councils,

Councils, which any man may conſult, who pleaſes.

Now I would ask ſome few Queſtions about this matter. 1. Whether theſe Councils took a ſure and ſafe way to find out Truth? If they did not, what reaſon have we to believe that they determined right? If they did, then we may uſe the ſame way, which they did; for that which is a good way in one Age, is ſo another, and then there is no neceſſity of an Infallible Judge, to find out the ſenſe of Scripture, becauſe we have other certain ways of doing this; the ſame which all the ancient Councils obſerved.

2. I would know, whether it be not ſufficient for every Chriſtian to receive the Decrees and Determinations of theſe Councils, upon the ſame Reaſon and Authority which moved the Fathers aſſembled in Council to make theſe Decrees? Whether, for Inſtance, we muſt not believe the Eternal God-head of Chriſt, and that he is of the ſame ſubſtance with his Father, for the ſame Reaſons for which the *Nicene* Fathers believed this, and required all Chriſtians to believe it? If we muſt, then Scripture, and the ſenſe of the Catholick Church, not the Authority of a general Council, or any Infallible Judge, is the Reaſon of our Faith: For the *Nicene* Fathers, who were the firſt that met in a General Council, could not believe this, upon the Authority of any other General Council, much leſs upon their own Authority; unleſs we will ſay, that they firſt Decreed this, then believed it, becauſe they themſelves Decreed it. If Scripture, and the ſenſe of the Catholick Church, antecedently to the determinations of a General Council, or any other pretended Infallible Judge, be not a ſufficient foundation for our Faith, then the whole Chriſtian World, before the Council of *Nice*, which was the firſt general Council, had no ſufficient Foundati-

on for their Faith, for there was no particular Bishop, or Church in those days, which pretended to be the Infallible Interpreter of Scriptures. We Protestants have the same way to understand the Scriptures, have the same Reason and Foundation of our Faith, which the *Nicene* Fathers themselves had, or which any Christian could have, before there was any general Council, and if the Church of *Rome* do not think this enough, we cannot help that, we are abundantly satisfied with it.

The Authority of a general Council in those days, was deservedly sacred and venerable, not as an Infallible Judge, which they never pretended to, but as the most certain means they could possibly have to understand, what was, and in all Ages had been the received Doctrine of the Catholick Church. They met together not to make new Articles of Faith, which no Council in the World ever had any Authority to do, but to declare what was the truly ancient and Apostolick Faith; and to put it into such Words, as might plainly express the Catholick sense, and meet with the Distempers of that Age.

For this end Grave and Reverend Bishops assembled from all parts of the Christian World, not meerly to give their private Opinions of things, but to Declare what was the received Doctrine of those Churches, over which they presided; and I know no better Argument of an Apostolick Tradition, than the consent of all Churches, as remote from each other as East and West, which were planted by several Apostles, and differed very much from each other, in some External Rites and Usages, but yet all agreed in the same Faith. And this is the true Authority of those ancient Councils, that they were most likely to understand the true sense of Scripture, and of the

Catholick

Catholick Church. This is the Proteſtant Reſolution of Faith, and the *Nicene* Fathers themſelves had no other way, nor pretended to any other.

Nay, the Church of *Rome* her ſelf, as much as ſhe talks of Infallibility, makes very little uſe of it. She has never given us an infallible Comment on Scripture, but ſuffers her Doctors to write as fallible Comments, and in many things as contrary to each other, as any Proteſtant Divines do: And I cannot imagine what good Infallibility does, if an infallible Church has no better means of underſtanding Scripture, than the Comments of fallible men; that is, no better means than every fallible Church has; for no man can underſtand the Scripture ever the better for the Churches being infallible, unleſs this infallible Church improve this glorious Talent of Infallibility in Expounding Scripture; which ſhe has not done to this day, and I believe never will.

Indeed it is apparent, that Infallibility, as it is pretended to by the Church of *Rome*, can be of no uſe, either in the Reſolution of Faith, or in Confuting Hereticks, who deny this Infallibility; and then I cannot imagine what it is good for, but to multiply Diſputes, inſtead of ending them.

As for the Reſolution of Faith; ſuppoſe I ask a Papiſt, why he believes ſuch Articles, as the Divinity of Chriſt, or the Reſurrection of the dead, to be contained in Scripture? if he anſwer, as he muſt do, Becauſe he is taught ſo by the Church, which is infallible; my next Queſtion is, How he knows the Church to be infallible? If he ſays he learns this from Scripture; I ask him how he comes to underſtand the Scripture, and how he knows that this is the ſenſe of it? If he know this by the infallible interpretation of the Church, then he runs round in a

Circle,

Circle, and knows the Scripture by the Church, and the Church by the Scripture, as I obſerved before; if he can find out the Churches infallibility by the Scripture, without the help of an infallible Judge, then it ſeems the Scripture is to be underſtood without the infallible interpretation of the Church; and if men can find out infallibility in Scripture without the Church, I am confident they may find out any thing elſe in Scripture as well, without the Churches infallibility; For there is no Article of our Creed ſo hard to be found there, as the Churches infallibility is. But however that be, after all this boaſt of infallibility, a Papiſt has no more infallible Foundation for his Faith, than a Proteſtant has, nor half ſo much. We believe the Articles of the Chriſtian Faith, becauſe we find them plainly taught in Scripture, and univerſally received as the ſenſe of Scripture by the Catholick Church in the beſt and pureſt Ages of it: A Papiſt believes the Church to be infallible, becauſe he thinks he finds it in Scripture, though the Catholick Church for many Ages never found it there, and the greateſt part of the Chriſtian Church to this day cannot find it there: Now if they will but allow, that a Proteſtant (though a poor fallible Creature) may reaſon about the ſenſe of Scripture, as well as a Papiſt, and that the Evidence of reaſon is the ſame to both, then we Proteſtants ſtand upon as firm ground as the Papiſts here, and are at leaſt as certain of all thoſe Doctrines of Faith, which we find in the Scripture, and are ready to prove by it, as they are of their Churches infallibility; but then we have an additional Security, that we Expound the Scriptures right, which they want, and that is the Doctrine and Practice of the Primitive Church, which confirms all the Articles of our Faith, and Rules of Worſhip

ſhip and Diſcipline, but gives not the leaſt intimation, that the Pope or Church of *Rome*, was thought infallible by them, and if the Primitive Church was ignorant of this, which is the beſt witneſs of Apoſtolical Tradition, it is moſt probable, that no ſuch thing is contained in Scripture, though ſome mercenary Flatterers of the Pope have indeavoured to perſwade the World, that they found it there.

So that we have a greater aſſurance of all the Articles of our Religion, from Scripture and Catholick Tradition, than a Papiſt can have of the Churches Infallibility, and yet he can have no greater aſſurance of any other Doctrines of Religion, which he believes upon the Churches Infallibility, than he has of Infallibility it ſelf. So that in the laſt Reſolution of Faith, the Proteſtant has much the advantage of the Papiſt, for the Proteſtant reſolves his Faith into the Authority of the Scriptures, Expounded by the Doctrine and Practice of the Primitive Church, the Papiſt reſolves his into the Infallibility of the Church, which he finds out only by Expounding Scripture by a private Spirit, without the Authority of any Church, but that whoſe Authority is under diſpute.

And as the Doctrine of Infallibility is of no uſe in the laſt Reſolution of Faith, ſo it is wholly uſeleſs in diſputing with ſuch Hereticks as we are; who deny Infallibility: for it is a vain thing to attempt to impoſe any abſurd, or groundleſs, and uncatholick Doctrines upon us, by the Churches infallible Authority, who believe there is no ſuch infallible Judge; but are reſolved to truſt our own Eyes, and to adhere to Scripture and the Catholick Faith of the Primitive Church in theſe matters.

And therefore the great Advocates for the Church of *Rome*, are forc'd to take the ſame courſe in confu-

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ting Hereſies, as they call them, that we do: They alledge the Authority of Scripture, the Authority of Fathers and Councils, to juſtifie their Innovations, and here we willingly joyn iſſue with them, and are ready to prove, that Scripture and all true Antiquity is on our ſide; and this has been often and unanſwerably proved by the Learned Patrons of the Reformation.

But there are ſome very material things to be obſerved from hence, for our preſent purpoſe. For either they think this a good way to prove what they intend, and to convince Gain-ſayers by the Authority of Scripture, and Primitive Antiquity, or they do not. If they do not think this a good way, to what purpoſe are there ſo many Volumes of Controverſie written? Why do they produce Scripture, and Fathers, and Councils, to juſtifie the Uſurpations of their Church, and thoſe new Additions they have made to the Chriſtian Faith and Worſhip? If this be not a good way to Convince a Heretick, why do they give themſelves and us ſuch an impertinent trouble?

If this be a good way, then we are in a good way already, we take that very way for our ſatisfaction, which by their own Confeſſion and Practice, is a very proper means for the Conviction of Hereticks, and to diſcover the Truth, and after the moſt diligent inquiries we can make, we are ſatisfied that the Truth is on our ſide.

If the Authority of Scripture ſignifie any thing in this matter, then it ſeems Hereticks, who reject the Authority of an Infallible Judge, may underſtand Scripture without an Infallible Interpreter, by the Exerciſe of Reaſon and Judgment in ſtudying of them, otherwiſe why do they pretend to expound Scripture

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to us, and to Convince us by Reaſon and Argument, what the true ſenſe of Scripture is.

If the Authority of the Primitive Church, and firſt Chriſtian Writers, be conſiderable, (as they acknowledge it is, by their appeals to them) then, at leaſt, the preſent Pope or Church, is not the ſole infallible Judge of Controverſies, unleſs they will ſay, that we muſt not judge of the Doctrine or Practice of the Primitive Church, by ancient Records, (and then *Baronius* his Annals are worth nothing) but by the Judgment and Practice of the preſent Church.

The ſum is this, There is great reaſon to ſuſpect, that the Church of *Rome* her ſelf, does not believe her own Infallibility, no more than we Proteſtants do; for if ſhe does, ſhe ought not to ſuffer her Doctors to diſpute with Hereticks, from any other Topick, but her own Authority; when they vie Reaſons and Arguments with us, and diſpute from Scripture and Antiquity: they appeal from the infallibility of the preſent Church, to every mans private Reaſon and Judgment, as much as any Proteſtant does: and if the Articles of the Chriſtian Faith may be eſtabliſh'd by Scripture and Antiquity, without an infallible Judge, as they ſuppoſe they may be, by their frequent attempts to do it; this plainly overthrows the neceſſity of an infallible Judge. In a word, not to take notice now, how weak and groundleſs this pretence of Infallibility is, it is evident, that it is a very uſeleſs Doctrine; for thoſe who believe the Churches Infallibility, have no greater aſſurance of their Faith, than we have, who do not believe it; and thoſe who do not believe the Churches Infallibility, can never be Confuted by it. So that it can neither eſtabliſh any mans Faith, nor confute any Hereſies; that is, it is of no uſe at all.

The Church of *England* Reverences the Authority of the Primitive Church, as the beſt witneſs of the Apoſtolical Faith and Practice, but yet reſolves her Faith at laſt into the Authority of the Scriptures. She receives nothing for an Article of Faith, which ſhe does not find plainly enough taught in Scripture, but it is a great confirmation of her interpretation of Scripture, that the Primitive Church owned the ſame Doctrines, which ſhe does; and ſhe looks upon it as a juſt prejudice againſt any Expoſitions of Scripture, if they contradict the common Faith of the firſt Chriſtians; and therefore when the words of Scripture are fairly capable of different ſenſes, ſhe chuſes that ſenſe which is moſt agreeable with the Catholick Faith, and practice of the Primitive Church; but ſhould any Doctrines be impoſed upon her, as Articles of Faith, which are no where to be found in Scripture, or which are plainly contrary to it, (as the new *Trent* Creed is) whatever pretence there be for the Antiquity of ſuch Doctrines, ſhe utterly rejects them; ſhe will not put out her own Eyes to follow any other Guide; and thanks be to God, ſhe needs not reject any truly Catholick Doctrine in this way. We ſtill retain the Faith of the Primitive Church, and are greatly confirmed in it, from that admirable conſent there is between the Scriptures, as Expounded by us, and that Faith which was anciently owned and received by all Chriſtians.

Having thus ſhewn in what ſenſe the Church is the Interpreter of Scripture: I proceed now to the Second thing contained in this Paper, That this Church muſt be known to be the true Church, by its continual viſible Succeſſion from Chriſt till our days. Now theſe few words contain a great many, and very great miſtakes. The ſubject of the Inquiry is, how we may find out ſuch

ſuch a Church, whoſe word we may ſafely take for the true ſenſe and meaning of Scripture.

Now, 1. The Author of this Paper, whether ignorantly, or deſignedly, I know not, alters the ſtate of the Queſtion, and inſtead of a Church, which is an unerring and infallible Interpreter of Scripture, which would be very well worth finding, he tells us how we may know a true Church; now I take a true Church, and an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, to be very different things. A Church may be guilty of Schiſm and Hereſie, and yet may be a true Church, though not a ſound, Orthodox, and Catholick Church; for a true Church is ſuch a Church, as has all things neceſſary, and eſſential to the Being and Conſtitution of a Church; this a Church may have, and ſuperadd other things, which are deſtructive of the Chriſtian Faith, and very dangerous and fatal miſtakes; as we believe, and are able to prove the Church of *Rome* has done; and yet we acknowledge her a true Church, becauſe ſhe retains the true Chriſtian Faith, though miſerably Corrupted by Additions of her own; as a man is a true man, though he be ſick of a mortal Diſeaſe. Now if a true Church may corrupt the Chriſtian Faith, we have no reaſon to rely on the Authority of every true Church, for the true ſenſe and meaning of Scripture.

2. Let us ſuppoſe, that by a true Church, he means an Infallible Church, whoſe Authority we may ſafely rely on in Expounding Scriptures; this Church, he ſays, is to be known by a continual viſible Succeſſion from Chriſt, till our days: Now if this viſible uninterrupted Succeſſion be the mark of ſuch a true Church, as is an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, then, 1. The *Greek* Church is an infallible Interpreter of Scripture; for ſhe has as viſible and un-

interrupted a Succeſſion, from Chriſt and his Apoſtles to this day, as the Church of *Rome* has; and ſo we have two infallible Churches (not to inſtance in any more at preſent, who have as good a Succeſſion as either of them) which are directly oppoſite to each other; and what ſhall we do in this Caſe? Muſt we believe Contradictions, or muſt we diſ-believe infallible Churches?

2. If a viſible Succeſſion from Chriſt and his Apoſtles makes any Church an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, then all the Churches, which were planted by the Apoſtles, were infallible. All the Churches which were planted by the Apoſtles, have an equally viſible Succeſſion from Chriſt; thoſe Churches which were planted by the Apoſtles, may be preſumed as infallible while the Apoſtles were preſent with them, as they were afterwards; and thoſe Churches which ſucceeded theſe Apoſtolical Churches, at the diſtance of an Age or two, may be ſuppoſed as infallible as any Church of this Age is; for if a viſible Succeſſion from Chriſt makes a Church infallible, why ſhould not a Succeſſion of a hundred, or two hundred years make them as infallible as a Succeſſion of ſixteen hundred years, unleſs they think that Infallibility increaſes with the Age of the Church, which I could wiſh true, but we ſee very little ſign of it. Now according to theſe Principles all the Churches which were planted by the Apoſtles, and have a continual viſible Succeſſion from Apoſtolical Churches, through all Ages, ſince the time of the Apoſtles, muſt be infallible; for if a continual viſible Succeſſion confers Infallibility, and is the mark whereby we muſt know it, then every Church, which ever had, or has to this day this viſſible Succeſſion, muſt have Infallibility alſo, which, it ſeems, is entailed on Succeſſion. And thus we have

have found out a World of infallibility, and it is wonderful, how any Apoſtolical Church came to be o-over-run with ſo many Errors and Hereſies, and to grow ſo corrupt and degenerate, as to provoke God to root them up; if every Apoſtolical Church was infallible, I cannot imagine how whole Churches, which viſibly ſucceeded the Apoſtles, ſhould be infected with Hereſie; for if Infallibility it ſelf will not ſecure a Church from Hereſie, the Lord have mercy upon us.

3. This mark he gives how to find out ſuch a true Church as is an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, *viz.* A continual viſible Succeſſion from Chriſt till this day, includes another great miſtake; for it ſuppoſes, that there is ſome Church now in being, on whoſe Authority we muſt rely for the ſenſe of Scripture; for otherwiſe there can be no uſe of a viſible Succeſſion to this day, in this Controverſie: if, as I have already proved at large, we muſt rely only on the Authority of the Primitive Church, not of the Church of this preſent Age, for the ſenſe of Scripture, and that not as an infallible Judge, but as the moſt Authentick Witneſs of the Apoſtolical Doctrine and Practice, then we cannot find out this Church by a viſible Succeſſion to this day, but by examining the ancient Records of the Primitive Church, where we ſhall find what the Faith and Practice of the Church in thoſe days was, which is the ſafeſt Rule to guide us in the Expoſition of Scripture. Though there were no Church in the World at this day, which could prove a continual viſible Succeſſion from Chriſt and his Apoſtles, yet while we have the Scriptures, and the Records of the Primitive Church, we have very ſufficient means for the underſtanding the true meaning of Scripture: So that of whatever uſe this talk of a continual

ual visible Succession may be in other Cases; it is wholly impertinent in this. A Church which cannot prove such a continual visible Succession, which was not founded by any Apostle, or Apostolical men, or has lost the Memory or Records of its first Plantation, may yet have very certain means of knowing the true sense of Scripture, from the Scripture it self, and the Doctrine and Practice of Apostolical and Primitive Churches, and a Church which has the most visible uninterrupted Succession from Christ and his Apostles, may be so far from being an infallible Interpreter of Scripture, that she may be very corrupt and erroneous her self, if she forsake the Apostolical Tradition, contained in the Writings of the new Testament, and Expounded by the Catholick Faith and Practice of the first Churches; as we know the Church of *Rome* has done, which is so far from being an infallible Church, that we believe her to be the most corrupt Church in the World.

And thus I think we are prepared to venture upon the last Clause of this Paper, wherein the whole force of the Argument, such as it is, is turned upon the poor Protestant Churches. But I doubt (says the Author of this Paper) whether or no the Protestant Church can make out this continual visible Succession, and desire to be informed. The sting of which Argument lies in this, that we Protestants have no certain way of knowing the true sense and meaning of Scripture, because we cannot prove the continual visible Succession of our Church, from Christ unto this day; and therefore we ought to go over to the Church of *Rome*, who has this visible Succession, and receive all her Dictates as infallible Oracles. But, for Answer to this, consider,

1. That suppose the Protestant Church could not make

make out such a continual visible Succession, yet we may understand the Scriptures very well without it, and need not go to the Church of *Rome* to Expound Scripture for us, as I have already shewn at large. Had he proved that we had been no Church, for want of a visible Succession of Church Officers, or that our Religion were a Novelty, which was never heard of in the World before *Luther*, this had been something more to the purpose; but to pretend that we cannot understand the Scriptures, for want of a visible Succession, is such a loose and inconsequent way of reasoning, as a poor fallible Protestant would be ashamed of.

2. But pray, why can't the Protestant Church of *England* prove her continual visible Succession from Christ till this day, as well as the Church of *Rome*? Here was a Christian Church planted in this Nation, as very good Historians say, as early as at *Rome*, and it has continued here ever since, to this day: when *Austin* the Monk came over to *England*, he found here a company of resolute *Brittish* Bishops and Monks, who would not submit to the Usurpations of *Rome*, and the *English* and *Brittish* Churches under several Changes and Alterations, have continued to this day, with a visible Succession of Christian Bishops, and what better Succession can *Rome* shew than this?

I suppose no *Roman* Catholick will disown the Succession of the Church of *England*, till the Reformation, and I pray, how came we to lose our Succession then? Did the Reformation of those Abuses and Corruptions, which had crept into the Church, unchurch us? Just as much as a man ceases to be the same man, when he is cured of some mortal Disease: Did not the Church of *England* consist of the same Persons

Persons, before the Reformation and after? A great many indeed disowned the Reformation; but were not at all those Persons, who were so active and zealous in the Reformation, formerly of the *Roman* Communion? And did they lose their Succession too, when they became Reformers? When a Church consists of the same Bishops, Priests, and People, which she had before, though she have not all the same that she had; when she retains the same ancient Catholick and Apostolick Faith, which she did before, only renounces some Errors and Innovations, which she owned before, how does this forfeit her Succession? The Church of *England* is the very same Church now, since the Reformation, which she was before, and therefore has the very same Succession, though not the same Errors, to this day, that ever she had; and that, I think, is as good a Succession as the Church of *Rome* has.

There are but two things to be considered in the case of Succession: Either a Succession of Church Officers, or a Succession of the Faith and Doctrines of the Church.

1. As for a Succession of Church Officers, we have the same that the Church of *Rome* has. Those *English* Bishops who embraced the Reformation, received their Orders in the Communion of the Church of *Rome*, and therefore they had as good Orders, as any are in the Church of *Rome*; and these were the Persons, who Consecrated other Bishops, and so in Succession to this day. For as for the story of the Nags-head Ordination, that is so transparent a Forgery, invented many years after to reproach the Reformation, that I presume no sober *Roman* Catholick will insist on it.

But

But we are Hereticks and Schismaticks, and this forfeits our Orders, and our Succession together. But, 1. This charge ought first to be proved against us, that we are Hereticks and Schismaticks, we deny and abhor both the name and thing, and if we be not Hereticks, and Schismaticks, as we are sure we are not, and as the Church of *Rome* can never prove us to be, then according to their own Confession, our Orders must be good.

2. However be we Hereticks, or Schismaticks, or whatever they please to call us, how does this destroy our Orders and Succession? The Catholick Church would not allow in former Ages, that Heresie or Schism destroyed the validity of Orders. St. *Jerome* disputes against this at large, in his Book *Contra Luciferianos*. And St. *Austin* allows the *Donatists* Bishops to have valid Orders, though they were Schismaticks, and therefore that the Sacraments administred by them were valid. And indeed, if Heresie will destroy Orders and Succession, the Church of *Rome* will be as much to seek for their Orders and Succession, as we are, which, by their own Confession, have had several Heretical Popes, and no body knows how many Bishops Ordained by them.

2. As for Succession of Doctrine, which is as considerable to the full, as Succession of Orders, the great Articles of our Faith are not only plainly contained in Scripture, but have been delivered down to us, through all ages of the Church by an uninterrupted Succession.

The Church of *Rome* her ſelf, in her greateſt Degeneracy, did own all that we do in pure matters of Faith: When we reformed the Church we did not make a new Religion, but only ſeparated the old Faith from new and corrupt Additions; and therefore the quarrel of the Church of *Rome* with us, is not that we believe any thing which they do not believe, but that we do not believe all that they would have us.

The Doctrine of the Church of *England* is truly Primitive and Catholick, taught by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, owned by the Primitive Church, and excepting the Diſpute between the *Latin* and *Greek* Church, about the *Filioque*, or the Holy Spirits proceeding from the Father and the Son, received by all Catholick Churches to this day; which is as compleat and perfect Succeſſion, as any Doctrine can have; therefore when the Church of *Rome* asks us, Where was our Religion before *Luther*? we tell them it was all the World over, all Catholick Churches believed what we do, though we do not believe all that they do, they themſelves did, and do to this Day, own our Creeds, and Articles of Faith, excepting ſuch of them as are directly oppoſed to their Innovations.

So that we are on a ſure Foundation, our Faith has been received in the Catholick Church in all Ages. But now the Church of *Rome* cannot ſhew ſuch a Succeſſion for her new Doctrines and Articles of Faith, which were unknown to the Primitive Church for many Ages, which were rejected by many flouriſhing Churches, ſince the firſt appearance

pearance of them, which never had a quiet poſſeſſion in her own Communion, and were never formed into Articles of Faith, till the packt Conventicle of *Trent*.

This I think is a ſufficient Anſwer to this Paper, and it pities me to ſee ſo many well-meaning Perſons abuſed with ſuch tranſparent Sophiſtry.

FINIS.

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